

# Fifth Disease

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## **What is fifth disease?**

Fifth disease is a viral infection caused by human parvovirus B19. It is a common childhood disease. Once you have had the disease, you are usually immune from getting again.

## **Who gets fifth disease?**

Fifth disease most commonly occurs in elementary age children, although anyone can contract the virus.

## **What are the symptoms of fifth disease?**

About 1 to 2 weeks after exposure, symptoms will begin to appear, starting with a low grade fever, runny nose, headache, tiredness, and malaise. This is followed by a facial rash, referred to as “slapped cheeks”, which progresses into a lace-like rash on the trunk, legs, and arms.

Approximately 20% of people do not have symptoms. Adults may develop joint pain and swelling which usually lasts 1 to 3 weeks, but it can last for months or longer. It usually goes away without any long-term problems.

## **How is fifth disease spread?**

Fifth disease is spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions (saliva or nasal mucus), such as sharing a drinking cup or eating utensils. A person is contagious for about a week before the rash begins. After you get the rash, you are probably not contagious. So, it is usually safe for you to go back to work or for your child to go back to school or child care.

## **What is the treatment for fifth disease?**

There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. Fifth disease is usually mild and will go away on its own. Children and adults who are otherwise healthy usually recover completely. Treatment usually involves relieving symptoms, such as fever, itching, and joint pain and swelling. Fever should be treated with non-aspirin products. Patients should also get plenty of rest and fluids. People who have complications from fifth disease should see their healthcare provider for medical treatment.

## **Are there complications from fifth disease?**

Complications usually occur in people who have an impaired immune system or have some kinds of anemia. Everyone who suffers from these conditions should consult a physician if they are exposed to the virus.

Some studies have shown that a few women infected while pregnant have a higher risk of miscarriage early in pregnancy. Also, the virus may infect the fetus and cause

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complications. Pregnant women who are exposed should consult their doctor as soon as possible.

### **How can fifth disease be prevented?**

There is no vaccine to prevent infection with this virus. People with fifth disease are most contagious when it seems like they have "just a cold" and before they get the rash or joint pain and swelling. You can reduce your chance of being infected with parvovirus B19 or infecting others by:

- washing your hands often with soap and water,
- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze,
- not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth,
- avoiding close contact with people who are sick, and
- staying home when you are sick.

### **How do I get more information on fifth disease?**

Calhoun County Public Health Department  
Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/parvovirusB19/fifth-disease.html>  
Phone: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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